

Message Text

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FM SECSTATE WASHDC

TO WHITE HOUSE IMMEDIATE 0000

AMEMBASSY AMMAN IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY CAIRO IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV IMMEDIATE

AMCONSUL JERUSALEM IMMEDIATE

S E C R E T STATE 099995

NODIS

FOLLOWING REPEAT DAMASCUS 2164 ACTION SECSTATE DATED APRIL 18, 1978.

QUOTE: S E C R E T DAMASCUS 2164

NODIS

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1

TAGS: PEPR, LE, SY, US, XF

SUBJ: FAREWELL CALL ON ASSAD APRIL 17

REF: STATE 097554

SUMMARY: ASSAD AGAIN EXPRESSED HIS DESIRE TO EXPAND BILATERAL
SYRIAN-US RELATIONS AND IN THIS CONNECTION SHOWED AWARENESS OF
AND INTEREST IN SOLVING THE AID PIPELINE PROBLEM. ON MIDDLE
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EAST PEACE, HE REMAINS HIGHLY CRITICAL OF THE AEST INITIATIVE
REGARDING LEBANON, ASSAD AGAIN REJECTED IDEA OF A
F MOVING
SOUTH INTO PALESTINIAN-CONTROLLED AREAS ON GROUNDS THAT SUCH
A MOVE WOULD BE SEEN AS HELPING PRIMARILY ISRAEL. I NEVERTHELESS
FELT HE DID NOT TOTALLY CLOSE THE DOOR ON SOME SUCH FUTURE
MOVE. HE EXPRESSED WARM APPRECIATION FOR PRESIDENT CARTER'S
APRIL 14 LETTER AND ITS ASSURANCE THAT US POSITION CONCERNING
ISRAELI WITHDRAWAL REMAINED AS PRESIDENT CARTER EXPRESSED IT
IN THEIR GENEVA MEETING. HE LOOKS FORWARD TO CONTINUING EXCHANGES
OF VIEWS WITH PRESIDENT CARTER. END SUMMARY.

1. MET WITH ASSAD FOR 90 MINUTES AFTERNOON APRIL 17. DISCUSSION COVERED PRESIDENT'S APRIL 14 LETTER AND ALL OF TALKING POINTS REFTEL. AFTER I HAD CONCLUDED PRESENTATION OF TALKING POINTS, PRESIDENT ASKED IF HE SHOULD CONSIDER THEM AS A MESSAGE FROM THE SECRETARY. I SAID THAT THEY REPRESENTED DEPARTMENT'S VIEWS AND WERE FUNDAMENTAL ISSUES I HAD DISCUSSED IN WASHINGTON LAST WEEK. THEY DID NOT CONSTITUTE, HOWEVER, A FORMAL MESSAGE FROM SECRETARY VANCE.

2. BILATERAL ECONOMIC COOPERATION. ASSAD THEN COMMENTED ON THE ECONOMIC ASPECTS OF OUR BILATERAL RELATIONS SAYING HE WAS HEARING CONFLICTING STORIES WHETHER THE US OR THE SYRIAN SIDE WAS CAUSING THE GREATER DELAYS IN PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION. I SAID THAT NEITHER SIDE WAS TOTALLY BLAMELESS BUT IN A NUMBER OF INSTANCES WE HAD ENCOUNTERED EXTENDED DELAYS IN DEALING WITH SYRIAN BUREAUCRACY, EVEN AFTER THEY HAD BECOME FAMILIAR WITH OUR PROCESSES. WE FACED A PARTICULAR PROBLEM IN THAT WE JUSTIFIED OUR AID REQUESTS TO CONGRESS AS URGENT NEEDS OF THE RECIPIENT COUNTRY. WHEN CONGRESS EXAMINED RECORD AND SAW THAT ONLY ABOUT 10 PERCENT OF THE FUNDS ALLOCATED DURING THE LAST THREE FISCAL YEARS FOR SYRIA
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HAD BEEN DISBURSED, CONGRESS NATURALLY PROBED FOR AN EXPLANATION OF THE DELAYS. ASSAD SAID IT WAS REGRETTABLE WE APPARENTLY ALWAYS INSISTED ON DOING OUR OWN STUDIES AND ARE UNABLE TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF STUDIES ALREADY IN EXISTENCE SUCH AS THAT FOR THE DAMASCUS-DERA'A ROAD. (COMMENT: THIS PARTICULAR EXAMPLE IS BADLY CHOSEN SINCE AID IS WORKING WITH A FRENCH STUDY ON THAT ROAD PREPARED UNDER WORLD BANK CONTRACT. I WILL SEE THAT WORD REACHES ASSAD WE ARE MERELY AMERICANIZING THE FRENCH SPECIFICATIONS AND NOT REPEATING THE BASIC STUDY.) HOWEVER, ASSAD SAID, HE WAS AWARE OF THE PROBLEMS TO WHICH I REFERRED, HAVING RECEIVED WORD SOME WEEKS AGO FROM HIS EMBASSY IN WASHINGTON ABOUT THE CONGRESSIONAL HEARINGS. HE FULLY AGREED THAT SPEED IN IMPLEMENTATION WAS VITAL, NOTING THAT GIVEN CONTINUING INFLATION ANY LOAN LOSES ITS VALUE WITH THE PASSAGE OF TIME. HE ASKED WHETHER ANY COMMODITY IMPORTS WOULD BE INCLUDED IN THE 1978 PROGRAM. I SAID THAT IT APPEARED THAT SEVERAL MILLION DOLLARS WOULD BE AVAILABLE FOR THIS PROPOSE.

3. BILATERAL POLITICAL COOPERATION. ASSAD THEN EXPANDED ANIMATEDLY ON HIS DESIRE TO BROADEN OUR BILATERAL RELATIONS. "IT IS A FIRM LINE OF SYRIAN POLICY TO CONTINUE COOPERATION. DEVELOPMENTS IN THE LAST FEW YEARS HAVE BEEN GOOD. THEY COULD HAVE BEEN BETTER, BUT SOMETIMES THIS GOAL CLASHED WITH CERTAIN POLITICAL QUESTIONS ARISING FROM AMERICAN JEWISH SUPPORT OF ISRAEL. THIS, IT APPEARS, IS A CHRONIC PROBLEM IN THE UNITED STATES." SAID HE SAW

GROUND'S TO BELIEVE THAT US PUBLIC OPINION WAS "GRADUALLY
FREEING ITSELF FROM ZIONIST DEMINATION."

4. SYRIA, HE EMPHASIZED, WANTS REAL PEACE AND, AS HE HAD
SAID SO MANY TIMES BEFORE, THIS REQUIRES A COMPLETE
WITHDRAWAL FROM THE TERRITORIES OCCUPIED IN 1967
AND SECURING THE RIGHTS OF ARAB PALESTINIANS. VERY OFTEN,
ASSAD OBSERVED, WE SEEM CLOSE TO EACH OTHER'S POINTS
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OF VIEW ON THESE MATTERS. HE HAD FELT THIS PARTICULARLY
IN HIS GENEVA MEETING WITH PRESIDENT CARTER AND DURING
THE SECRETARY'S DECEMBER VISIT TO DAMSCUS. OF COURSE
DIFFERENCES REMAINED BETWEEN THE SYRIAN AND AMERICAN VIEWS
EVEN THOUGH ON CERTAIN ISSUES WE HAVE GROWN CLOSER.

5. SADAT INITIATIVE. ASSERTING HE WAS SPEAKING OBJECTIVELY,
PRESIDENT SAID SYRIA IS PRESUADED THAT SADAT'S VISIT HAS
BEEN A DISSERVICE TO PEACE. PERHAPS THE US ADMINISTRATION
VIEWS THIS DIFFERENTLY, GIVEN OUR FOCUS ON
US PUBLIC OPINION ("AND WORLD OPINION," I INTER-
JECTED). HE ACKNOWLEDGED WORLD OPINION HAD BEEN AFFECTED
TO A CERTAIN EXTENT. "BUT YOU AMERICANS HAVE NOT LOOKED
AT IT FROM THE OTHER PERSPECTIVES." I SAID THAT ONE OTHER
PERSPECTIVE WAS TO EXAMINE POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS WITHIN ISRAEL,
CITING THE RECENT DEMONSTRATION AGAINST BEGIN BY IDF RESERVISTS.
TO PRESIDENT'S COMMENT THAT THERE HAD BEEN A SUBSEQUENT
PRO-BEGIN DEMONSTRATION, I SAID THE LATTER APPEARED
IN COMPARISON TO HAVE BEEN A SUPERFICIAL AFFAIR.

6. BEFORE SADAT'S VISIT TO JERUSALEM, ASSAD CONTINUED,
ISRAEL HAD BEEN SURROUNDED AND EVEN ITS FRIENDS HAD FELT
EMBARRASSED TO SUPPORT IT. NOW THE SITUATION HAD
CHANGED. NO ONE SHOULD EXPECT FRANCE, FOR EXAMPLE, OR
ANY OTHER COUNTRY TO BE MORE ENTHUSIASTIC FOR THE ARAB
CAUSE THAN THE ARABS ARE THEMSELVES. ANY SOLUTION
REACHED MUST REFLECT THE RIGHTS OF THE PEOPLE AND
THEIR PRIDE. "A SOLUTION REACHED THROUGH SUBMISSION TO
THE ENEMY WILL NOT BE DURABLE. SADAT SURRENDERED THE DIGNITY
OF OUR PEOPLE AND OUR RIGHTS BY BOWING TO THE ISRAELI
FLAG." THIS, ASSAD COMPLAINED, "MAKES THE ARAB PEOPLE
APPEAR AS OF NO WEIGHT. I SAID THIS NOT IN A SPIRIT OF
HATRED OR REVENGE BUT BECAUSE OUR DIGNITY MANS SO MUCH
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TO US." HE HAD TOLD SOME FELLOW ARAB LEADERS THAT THE
ARABS COULD NOT ASK AMERICANS TO BE ENTHUSIASTIC ABOUT THEIR
CAUSE WHEN CERTAIN ARAB LEADERS LACK ENTHUSIASM FOR THAT CAUSE.
ASSAD WAS PERSUADED THAT EVEN PRESIDENT CARTER, AS RESULT OF
SADAT'S INITIATIVES, HAS LOST SOME POSSIBLE LEVERS HE COULD

HAVE USED WITH ISRAEL IN THE NEGOTIATING PROCESS. THAT IS WHY SYRIA CONCLUDED THAT THE SADAT INITIATIVE WAS HARMFUL TO PEACE AND CREATED A STALEMATE.

7. ASKED WHY HE STILL BELIEVED AFTER ALL THE EVIDENCE OF THE MONTHS INTERVENING SINCE THE JERUSALEM VISIT THAT SADAT IS SEEKING A SEPARATE PEACE, ASSAD REPLIED DRILY, "SINCE HE WENT ALONE AND CANNOT DRAG OTHERS ALONG WITH HIM, INEVITABLY HE MUST REMAIN ALONE AND NOTHING ELSE (BUT A SEPARATE PEACE) CAN RESULT. SINCE 1973 SYRIA HAS BEEN SEEKING A PEACE BASED ON JUSTICE WHICH WILL REALIZE THE DIGNITY OF THE ARAB NATION. UNFORTUNATELY, SADAT HAS BROKEN RANKS WITH US BUT WE WILL CONTINUE TO SEEK PEACE AS BEST WE CAN."

8. LEBANON. TURNING TO THE LEBANESE SITUATION, ASSAD COMMENTED THAT NO ONE IS BEARING A BURDEN IN LEBANON AS HEAVY AS SYRIA'S. ITS CONSISTENT AIM IS SUPPORT OF SARKIS. HE THEN REVIEWED, WITHOUT ADDING ANYTHING TO ALREADY REPORTED SYRIAN VIEWS, LAST WEEK'S CLASH IN SHIYAH, EIN RUMANI. THIS TIME, HE NOTED, DISORDER ORIGINATED FROM THE CHRISTIAN SIDE ALTHOUGH SYRIA'S DEALINGS WITH THE CHRISTIANS HAD PREVIOUSLY BEEN BASED ON A GOOD UNDERSTANDING. CLEARLY, THERE ARE THOSE WHO WISH TO SEE FIGHTING CONTINUE. HE HAD SENT AN ENVOY (AIR FORCE SECURITY CHIEF AL-KHULI) TO MEET WITH THE CHRISTIANS WHILE KHADDAM HAD MET WITH THE OTHERS (COMMENT: BELIEVE BY "OTHERS" HE WAS REFERRING TO PALESTINIANS.) YESTERDAY IN DAMASCUS. SYRIA IS TRYING TO KEEP CONTACT WITH ALL PARTIES, DESPITE THE COMPLICATIONS CAUSED BY ISRAEL'S INVASION.

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9. REFERRING BACK TO MY OPENING REMARKS, I ASKED PRESIDENT WHETHER IF SARKIS AND WALDHEIM SHOULD ASK SYRIA TO EXPAND THE AREA WHERE ITS FORCES ARE PRESENT HE WOULD AGREE TO DOING SO. ASSAD QUICKLY ANSWERED, "WE WOULD REFUSE TO DO SO SINCE THERE IS AN ISRAELI INTEREST IN THIS MATTER. LAST YEAR WE TRIED TO MAKE SUCH AN ADVANCE, BUT WERE TOLD BY THE LEBANESE THAT THE ISRAELIS OPPOSED IT." I SAID IT WAS NOT IMPLYING THAT THERE WAS NOW AN OFFICIAL ISRAELI REQUEST FOR THE ADF TO ASSUME CONTROL OF AREA BETWEEN THE LITANI AND PRESENT ADF POSITION. PERHAPS NOT, ASSAD REPLIED, "BUT ISRAELIS CLEARLY WANT THE ADF TO EXPAND ITS AREA OF CONTROL SOUTHWARDS AND SINCE SUCH EXPANSION WOULD BE CONNECTED WITH THE ISRAELI AGGRESSION WE WOULD REFUSE IT." DESPITE FACT THAT SYRIAN TROOPS ARE UNDER SARKIS' ORDERS, ASSAD SAID, HE WOULD NOT APPROVE EXPANSION OF THE TERRITORY IN WHICH THEY OPERATED. I AGAIN URGED HE KEEP AN OPEN MIND. HE HESITATED, THEN REPLIED QUIETLY THAT NO ONE COULD PREDICT WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IN THE FUTURE AND SMILINGLY ADDED, "AS A GENERAL RULE, ANYTHING ISRAEL WANTS, WE OPPOSE, EVEN IF IT BE GOD HIMSELF."

10. IN CONCLUSION, ASSAD SENT HIS THANKS TO PRESIDENT CARTER FOR HIS APRIL 14 LETTER AND ASKED ME TO CONVEY HIS OWN REGARDS IN RETURN. HE HAD BEEN PLEASED TO LEARN THERE HAD BEEN NO CHANGE IN THE USG POSITION AS EXPRESSED BY CARTER AT GENEVA CONCERNING WITHDRAWAL TO 1967 BORDERS. HE ASSURED ME HE LOOKED FORWARD TO CONTINUING EXCHANGES BETWEEN HIMSELF AND PRESIDENT CARTER. AFTER THANKING ME FOR THE EFFORTS I HAD MADE DURING MY TOUR IN DAMASCUS TO IMPROVE SYRO-AMERICAN RELATIONS, ASSAD ADDED THAT UNDOUBTEDLY THINGS HAD BECOME MORE DIFFICULT AS A RESULT OF THE ISREALI INVASION OF LEBANON. HE HOPED OUR NEW AMBASSADOR WILL UNDERSTAND THE CONDITIONS IN THE REGION. I SAID HE NEED HAVE NO DOUBTS IN THIS REGARD.

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11. COMMENT: I FELT THAT ASSAD WAS LEAVING THE DOOR OPEN JUST A CRACK TO MOVING THE ADF SOUTHWARDS AT SOME LATER STAGE. REQUESTS TO DO SO FROM BOTH SARKIS AND THE UN WILL BE NEEDED AND IT WILL HELP IF ISRAELIS MAINTAIN PUBLIC SILENCE ON ANY SUCH MOVE. ONE THE OTHER HAND, I MAY BE READING TOO MUCH INTO HIS FINAL STATEMENT ON THIS ISSUE AND ALL HE MAY END UP DOING IN JAWBONING THE PALESTINIANS TO STAY QUIET AND OTHERWISE ACT TO FRUSTRATE THEIR OPERATIONS FROM PRESENT ADF POSITIONS.

12. SUGGEST PASS AMMAN, BEIRUT, CAIRO, TEL AVIV AND JERUSALEM. MURPHY UNQUOTE CHRISTOPHER

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